



Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

A new tool for training

A few years ago I took up skiing, and that's when I became an absolute weather junkie. I soon discovered Joe Bastardi, a weatherman with an uncanny ability for nailing the forecast weeks in advance — necessary information if you ski in southern Ontario.

Each day, Bastardi places a full 10-minute video online in which he discusses long-range weather trends. He has established quite an audience — so much so that AccuWeather.com now charges for access to his forecasts. What does this have to do with the accounting profession? Quite a bit, actually. It demonstrates the potential that online video training has.

The profession has long used video for educational purposes. As a CA student back in 1980, I remember watching grainy videotapes of a tax partner within the firm discussing new trends in tax. The tapes were filmed in one of our offices, duplicated and then sent around to all the other offices as part of a lunch-and-learn program.

We've come a long way since then, with a number of initiatives in the past few years involving online training.

For example, more than 1,000 hours of online training are available to staff of Grant Thornton through its Grant Thornton University. And Integrity Interactive, a company that specializes in ethics and integrity issues, has successfully developed a number of online training programs.

It is becoming evident that online video access can play a role in such training efforts, the key reason being that high-speed Internet, required for viewing online video, has become the rule, not the exception. A recent survey by comScore Media Metrix Canada found that some 53% of Internet users in Canada had a high-speed connection at home and/or at work, compared with 34% in the United States.

Chartered accountants who are involved in education and training and with strategic and management respon-

sibilities need to be aware that the process of capturing and encoding video for Web distribution has become increasingly straightforward.

In my own case, I regularly transfer video from my VHS recorder into my Sony digital

video camera as the first step to placing it online. From there, I use Ulead MediaStudio Pro to transfer the video into my computer using a Firewire card, a piece of hardware that is becoming standard on many PCs and Macs. Once the video is in my PC, I can then edit the program with MediaStudio to create a finished product. (Alternatives are Adobe Premiere and iMovie for Macintosh systems.) The learning curve isn't that steep, and I can prepare a fairly decent, professional-looking video with minimal effort.

Finally, I use Discreet's cleaner XL to encode the video for different forms of Internet playback. Essentially, this professional level tool takes the video that I've produced and compresses it for distribution on the Web in Quicktime, WindowsMedia and RealPlayer formats. That way, the video is viewable by most Internet users with a high-speed connection. I then embed links to the video throughout my website.

The world of PC- and Mac-based digital video editing has recently undergone a revolution. Gaining an understanding as to what is involved can be a critical first step in determining the future of your corporate training strategy.

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ONLINE VIDEO INFO

Integrity Interactive

www.integrity-interactive.com

Ulead MediaStudio Pro www.ulead.com

Adobe Premiere www.adobe.com

iMovie www.apple.com